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CONGRESSMAN

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HALL AND WOLF THREATEN INDONESIAN AID CUT-OFF; TIMORESE RIGHTS ABUSES CITED

Two prominent members of Congress are threatening a cut-off of U.S. aid to and trade with Indonesia unless human rights violations against residents of East Timor are halted immediately.

In a December 18th letter to Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Reps. Tony P. Hall (D-OH) and Frank Wolf (R-VA) urged the Department to press the Indonesian government to respond to recent allegations of massacre, murder, torture, beatings, rape and other serious abuses.

In 1975, Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. It is estimated that as many as 100,000 Timorese have died from the effects of the Indonesian invasion and occupation, including starvation and extra judicial killings.

On November 12, 1991, Indonesian security forces fired on East Timorese citizens marching in a funeral procession for a youth killed by troops in October. At least 75 to 100 mourners were mercilessly cut down by the automatic gunfire. Since then, several authoritative human rights organizations have reported further abuses and gross violations.

In releasing the letter, Rep. Hall noted that aid to Indonesia is jeopardized by its conduct towards East Timor. "At a time when budget constraints and global changes have made foreign aid a 'less-than-zero-sum game', we have to consider whether recipients of U.S. aid behave in a manner that is consistent with American standards of freedom and respect for human rights," he said. "When the Congress returns next year, the Indonesian government may find that their abhorrent acts of violence have cost them very dearly."

"I am very concerned about the continued hostilities in East Timor," added Wolf. "The gross violation of the human rights of the citizens of the former Portuguese colony is not acceptable. I call on the Indonesian Government to facilitate the arrival of international human rights organizations to monitor the conditions in East Timor."

The text of the Members' letter follows:

Dear Ambassador Schifter:

We are writing to express our growing concern about the situation in East Timor.

As you know, on November 12, Indonesian security forces killed at least 75 to 100 civilians during a funeral procession for an East Timorese youth killed by Indonesian troops on October 28, 1991. Several reliable sources, including Asia Watch and Amnesty International, have reported accounts of further killings, torture, beating, rape, and other serious abuses of East Timorese subsequent to the November 12 massacre.

While there are preliminary signs that the Indonesian government is sensitive to international and American pressure, we are very concerned by recent statements attributed to General Try Sutrisno, the chief of Indonesia's armed forces, in which he vows to "wipe out all separatist elements" after a government investigation is completed into the killings in East Timor last month.

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This gross violation of human rights standards by our close ally should not be acceptable. We urge you to press the Indonesian government to respond to these allegations. In the meantime, international observers should immediately be allowed to provide protection to the East Timorese during these perilous circumstances.

While Congress is now out of session, it should be understood that these issues, if not rectified, could lead to a cut-off of U. S. assistance to Indonesia and a review of U. S. trade benefits to that nation. Moreover, Indonesia's conduct in East Timor could lead to the termination of the annual multilateral aid package, $4.75 billion in 1991, dispensed by the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.